



HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Sickness Absence Policy

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

- 1.1 This Sickness Absence Policy sets out the Council's procedures for reporting sickness absence and for the management of sickness absence in a fair and consistent way.
- 1.2 Sickness absence can vary from short intermittent periods of ill-health to a continuous period of long-term absence and have a number of different causes (for example, injuries, recurring conditions, or a serious illness requiring lengthy treatment).
- 1.3 The Council wishes to ensure that the reasons for sickness absence are understood in each case and investigated where necessary. In addition, where needed and reasonably practicable, measures will be taken to assist those who have been absent by reason of sickness to return to work.
- 1.4 This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment and it may be amended at any time. The Council may also vary the procedures set out in this policy, including any time limits, as appropriate in any case.

2. WHO IS COVERED BY THE POLICY?

This policy covers all employees at all levels and grades, including senior managers, officers, directors, employees, trainees, homeworkers, part-time and fixed-term employees.

3. DISABILITIES

- 3.1 The Council is aware that sickness absence may result from a disability. At each stage of the sickness absence meetings procedure (set out in paragraph 12 of this policy), particular consideration will be given to whether there are reasonable adjustments that could be made to the requirements of a job or other aspects of working arrangements that will provide support at work and/or assist a return to work.
- 3.2 If you consider that you are affected by a disability or any medical condition which affects your ability to undertake your work, you should inform the Town Clerk.

4. SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORTING PROCEDURE

- 4.1 If you are taken ill or injured while at work you should report or be taken to the Town Clerk (Office Staff) or Grounds Foreman (Grounds Staff). Managers should make arrangements for anyone who is unwell to be accompanied home and / or to receive medical treatment where necessary.

If you cannot attend work because you are ill or injured you should normally telephone your line manager as early as possible and no later than 30 minutes after the time when you are normally expected to start work. The following details should be provided:

- (a) The nature of your illness or injury.
- (b) The expected length of your absence from work.
- (c) Contact details.
- (d) Any outstanding or urgent work that requires attention.

- 4.2 Managers should ensure that:

- (a) Any sickness absence that is notified to them is recorded and reported to the Town Clerk.
- (b) Arrangements are made, where necessary, to cover work and to inform colleagues and clients (while maintaining confidentiality).

- 4.3 You should expect to be contacted during your absence by your line manager who will want to enquire after your health and be advised, if possible, as to your expected return date.

- 4.4 If you are ill or injured during a period of pre-arranged annual leave you may elect to treat the days of incapacity as sickness absence instead of annual leave. You must inform your manager of your incapacity and its likely duration as soon as possible even if you are abroad. The usual requirements for self-certification and medical certificates in this policy will apply.

5. EVIDENCE OF INCAPACITY

- 5.1 For any sickness absence you must complete a self-certification form which is available from the Town Clerk.

- 5.2 For absence of more than a week you must obtain a certificate from your doctor (a "Statement of Fitness for Work") stating that you are not

fit for work and the reason(s) why. This should be forwarded to the Town Clerk as soon as possible. If your absence continues, further medical certificates must be provided to cover the whole period of absence.

- 5.3 If your doctor provides a certificate stating that you "may be fit for work" you should inform the Town Clerk immediately, who will discuss with you any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate your return to work, taking account of your doctor's advice. This may take place at a return to work interview (see paragraph 10). If appropriate measures cannot be taken, you will remain on sick leave and a date will be set to review the situation.
- 5.4 Where the Council is concerned about the reason for absence, or frequent short-term absence, a medical certificate for each absence regardless of duration may be required. In such circumstances, the Council will cover any costs incurred in obtaining such medical certificates, for absences of a week or less, on production of a doctor's invoice.

6. UNAUTHORISED ABSENCE

- 6.1 Cases of unauthorised absence will be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 6.2 Absence that has not been notified according to the sickness absence reporting procedure will be treated as unauthorised absence.
- 6.3 If you do not report for work and have not telephoned your line manager to explain the reason for your absence, your line manager will try to contact you, by telephone and in writing if necessary. This should not be treated as a substitute for reporting sickness absence.

7. SICK PAY

- 7.1 You should refer to your contract for details of the sick pay to which you are entitled.
- 7.2 If a period of sickness absence is or appears to be occasioned by actionable negligence, nuisance or breach of any statutory duty on the part of a third party, in respect of which damages are or may be recoverable, you must immediately notify the Town Clerk of that fact and of any claim, compromise, settlement or judgment made or awarded in connection with it and all relevant particulars that may be

reasonably required. If the Council requires you to do so, you must cooperate in any related legal proceedings and refund to it that part of any damages or compensation you recover that relates to lost earnings for the period of sickness absence as may be reasonably determined, less any costs you incurred in connection with the recovery of such damages or compensation, provided that the amount to be refunded to the Council shall not exceed the total amount it paid to you in respect of the period of sickness absence.

8. KEEPING IN CONTACT DURING SICKNESS ABSENCE

- 8.1 If you are absent on sick leave you should expect to be contacted from time to time by your line manager in order to discuss your wellbeing, expected length of continued absence from work and any of your work that requires attention. Such contact is intended to provide reassurance and will be kept to a reasonable minimum.
- 8.2 If you have any concerns while absent on sick leave, whether about the reason for your absence or your ability to return to work, you should feel free to contact your line manager at any time.

9. MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS

- 9.1 The Council may, at any time in operating this policy, ask you to consent to a medical examination by the Council's Occupational Health Department at our expense.
- 9.2 You will be asked to agree that any report produced in connection with any such examination may be disclosed to the Council and that the Council may discuss the contents of the report with the relevant practitioner.

10. RETURN-TO-WORK INTERVIEWS

- 10.1 If you have been absent on sick leave you will have a return-to-work interview with your line manager or Town Clerk.
- 10.2 A return-to-work interview enables the Council to confirm the details of your absence. It also gives you the opportunity to raise any concerns or questions you may have, and to bring any relevant matters to the Council's attention.
- 10.3 Where your doctor has provided a certificate stating that you "may be fit for work" your line manager will usually hold a return-to-work

interview to discuss any additional measures that may be needed to facilitate your return to work, taking account of your doctor's advice.

11. RETURNING TO WORK FROM LONG-TERM SICKNESS ABSENCE

11.1 The Council are committed to helping employees return to work from long-term sickness absence. As part of the sickness absence meetings procedure (see paragraph 12), the Council will, where appropriate and possible, support returns to work by:

- (a) Obtaining medical advice;
- (b) Making reasonable adjustments to the workplace, working practices and working hours;
- (c) Considering redeployment; and/or
- (d) Agreeing a return to work programme with everyone affected.

11.2 If you are unable to return to work in the longer term, the Council will consider whether you are entitled to any benefits under your contract.

12. SICKNESS ABSENCE MEETINGS PROCEDURE

12.1 The Council may apply this procedure whenever considered necessary, including, for example, if you:

- (a) Have been absent due to illness on a number of occasions;
- (b) Have discussed matters at a return to work interview that require investigation; and/or
- (c) Have been absent for more than 5 working days.

12.2 Unless it is impractical to do so, you will receive 3 working days written notice of the date, time and place of a sickness absence meeting. The Council will put any concerns about your sickness absence and the basis for those concerns in writing or otherwise advise why the meeting is being called. A reasonable opportunity for you to consider this information before a meeting will be provided.

12.3 The meeting will be conducted by the Town Clerk and / or your line manager. You may bring a companion with you to the meeting (see paragraph 13).

12.4 You must take all reasonable steps to attend a meeting. Failure to do so without good reason may be treated as misconduct. If you or your companion are unable to attend at the time specified you should

immediately inform your line manager who will seek to agree an alternative time.

- 12.5 A meeting may be adjourned if your line manager is awaiting receipt of information, needs to gather any further information or give consideration to matters discussed at a previous meeting. You will be given a reasonable opportunity to consider any new information obtained before the meeting is reconvened.
- 12.6 Confirmation of any decision made at a meeting, the reasons for it, and of the right of appeal will be given to you in writing within 5 working days of a sickness absence meeting (unless this time scale is not practicable, in which case it will be provided as soon as is practicable).
- 12.7 If, at any time, your line manager considers that you have taken or are taking sickness absence when you are not unwell, he / she may refer matters to be dealt with under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

13. RIGHT TO BE ACCOMPANIED AT MEETINGS

- 13.1 You may bring a companion to any meeting or appeal meeting under this procedure.
- 13.2 Your companion may be either a trade union representative or a fellow employee. Their identity must be confirmed to the line manager conducting the meeting, in good time before it takes place.
- 13.3 Employees are allowed reasonable time off from duties without loss of pay to act as a companion. However, they are not obliged to act as a companion and may decline a request if they so wish.
- 13.4 Some companions may not be allowed: for example, anyone who may have a conflict of interest, or whose presence may prejudice a meeting. Companions should not normally work at another site, unless no-one reasonably suitable is available at the site at which you work.
- 13.5 The Council may at its discretion, permit a companion who is not an employee or union representative (for example, a family member) where this will help overcome particular difficulties caused by a disability, or difficulty understanding English.
- 13.6 A companion may make representations, ask questions, and sum up your position, but will not be allowed to answer questions on your

behalf. You may confer privately with your companion at any time during a meeting.

14. STAGE 1: FIRST SICKNESS ABSENCE MEETING

14.1 This will follow the procedure set out above on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.

14.2 The purposes of a first sickness absence meeting may include:

- (a) Discussing the reasons for absence.
- (b) Where you are on long-term sickness absence, determining how long the absence is likely to last.
- (c) Where you have been absent on a number of occasions, determining the likelihood of further absences.
- (d) Considering whether medical advice is required.
- (e) Considering what, if any, measures might improve your health and/or attendance.
- (f) Agreeing a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting under the sickness absence procedure.

15. STAGE 2: FURTHER SICKNESS ABSENCE MEETING(S)

15.1 Depending on the matters discussed at the first stage of the sickness absence procedure, a further meeting or meetings may be necessary. Arrangements for meetings under the second stage of the sickness absence procedure will follow the procedure set out above on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.

15.2 The purposes of further meeting(s) may include:

- (a) Discussing the reasons for and impact of your ongoing absence(s).
- (b) Where you are on long-term sickness absence, discussing how long your absence is likely to last.
- (c) Where you have been absent on a number of occasions, discussing the likelihood of further absences.
- (d) If it has not been obtained, considering whether medical advice is required. If it has been obtained, considering the advice that has been given and whether further advice is required.

- (e) Considering your ability to return to/remain in your job in view both of your capabilities and our business needs and any adjustments that can reasonably be made to your job to enable you to do so.
- (f) Considering possible redeployment opportunities and whether any adjustments can reasonably be made to assist in redeploying you.
- (g) Where you are able to return from long-term sick leave, whether to your job or a redeployed job, agreeing a return to work programme.
- (h) If it is considered that you are unlikely to be able to return to work from long-term absence, whether there are any benefits for which you should be considered.
- (i) Agreeing a way forward, action that will be taken and a time-scale for review and/or a further meeting(s). This may, depending on steps that have already been taken, include warning you that you are at risk of dismissal.

16. STAGE 3: FINAL SICKNESS ABSENCE MEETING

16.1 Where you have been warned that you are at risk of dismissal, we may invite you to a meeting under the third stage of the sickness absence procedure. Arrangements for this meeting will follow the procedure set out above on the arrangements for and right to be accompanied at sickness absence meetings.

16.2 The purposes of the meeting will be:

- (a) To review the meetings that have taken place and matters discussed with you.
- (b) Where you remain on long-term sickness absence, to consider whether there have been any changes since the last meeting under stage two of the procedure, either as regards your possible return to work or opportunities for return or redeployment.
- (c) To consider any further matters that you wish to raise.
- (d) To consider whether there is a reasonable likelihood of you returning to work or achieving the desired level of attendance in a reasonable time.
- (e) To consider the possible termination of your employment.

16.3 Termination will normally be with full notice or payment in lieu of notice.

17. APPEALS

- 17.1 You may appeal against the outcome of any stage of this procedure and you may bring a companion to an appeal meeting (see paragraph 13).
- 17.2 An appeal should be made in writing, stating the full grounds of appeal, to the Town Clerk within 5 working days of the date on which the decision was sent to you.
- 17.3 Unless it is not practicable, you will be given written notice of an appeal meeting within one week of the meeting. In cases of dismissal the appeal will be held as soon as possible. Any new matters raised in an appeal may delay an appeal meeting if further investigation is required.
- 17.4 You will be provided with written details of any new information which comes to light before an appeal meeting. You will also be given a reasonable opportunity to consider this information before the meeting.
- 17.5 Where practicable, an appeal meeting will be conducted by a manager senior to the individual who conducted the sickness absence meeting.
- 17.6 Depending on the grounds of appeal, an appeal meeting may be a complete rehearing of the matter or a review of the original decision.
- 17.7 Following an appeal the original decision may be confirmed, revoked or replaced with a different decision. The final decision will be confirmed in writing, if possible within 5 working days of the appeal meeting. There will be no further right of appeal.
- 17.8 The date that any dismissal takes effect will not be delayed pending the outcome of an appeal. However, if the appeal is successful, the decision to dismiss will be revoked with no loss of continuity or pay.

18. MONITORING AND REVIEW OF THE POLICY

- 18.1 This policy is reviewed at least every 4 years or as required by Corporate Services Committee.
- 18.2 The Council will monitor the development and dissemination of good practice to ensure that this policy and the sickness absence meetings procedure are achieving their stated objectives.